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Room for Optimism

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"ROOM FOR OPTIMISM"

Prospects for more reading and better reading proficiency among the elementary students in the nation are looking ever brighter, now that we have bridged some of our attitude gaps and semantic chasms. We refer specifically to the observable evidence that parents are accepting the idea of pre-school experience as the first step in reading training. We may further note the closer cooperation between parents and early elementary teachers in helping children build concepts, learn various shapes, time, distance, and other discriminatory skills.

Still another cheering fact is the way in which more and more elementary principals have educated themselves to build, evaluate, and guide reading programs in their buildings and systems. No longer are they finding themselves at the mercy of glib publishers' representatives. No longer do principals call school-wide tests and a remedial room a reading program.

How did this measurable improvement come about? We believe one obstacle to progress which is rapidly disappearing is the barrier of semantics. Many parents used to think of sending their children "off to school" as if education were a different process than what had been going on at home. The idea of home-life as the reading readiness step did not exist. Thus, when teachers sought to build continuity between home experience and beginning literacy—the effort was seen as interference from school.

We feel a sense of gratitude for a new atmosphere that is building. Mothers of preschoolers are picking up materials made available to them at school, to better use games and activities that lay the foundation for ease in beginning reading. School boards have seen the wisdom of facilitating the printing and distribution of such materials. Enlightened principals have used their talents as coordinators instead of leaning on their authority. And we will all gain immeasurably as our children grow to maturity through reading.

Kenneth VanderMeulen
Editor